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The Hopelessness of Homelessness: *It doesn't have to be this way*

By: Suzanne Brown

Homelessness is a complicated problem in need of coordinated and creative community solutions. It involves issues of mental illness, woman abuse, child abuse, family breakdown, addictions, inadequate or invisible social support systems, and especially, poverty. In fact, poverty and homelessness are inexplicitly intertwined. Because homelessness is a combination of both clinical and systemic problems, it is profoundly difficult to solve. This is not to suggest that homelessness is a hopeless cause that cannot be solved in our community, but what this solution requires is the combined knowledge, expertise and capacities of all sectors of the community working together, along with substantial resources to support this work.

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On March 30, 1998, the Provincial Task Force on Supports and Services to the Homeless visited the Hamilton-Wentworth community.

This day-long exercise had two purposes: to educate provincial members of Parliament on the issues of homelessness in our community; and, to acquire a portion of the 4 million dollars the provincial government has recently allocated to service provision for people who are homeless. While this is not an extensive amount of money, when spread across the province, with creative brainstorming and planning, it would enable this community to develop a new, or build upon an existing strategy, to confront the problem of homelessness.

The first step in solving the problem is defining it. While the Task Force very narrowly defined homelessness as people who are living on the street at this very moment in time, a more appropriate definition would expand upon this to include people who "cannot find permanent accommodation that is both adequate and affordable" (Final Report of the Minister's Advisory Committee on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, 1987). This consists of people living in a hostel, shelter, tent, or in motels or rooming houses where only a portion of the monthly rent has been paid.

It also includes people involuntarily living with family members or friends. Being homeless means being disconnected, alienated and alone. It means being hated because you are an 'eyesore' and an 'embarrassment' in public places; it means having others fear you for who you are. It means being unhealthy because you never get enough sleep and are afraid to access health care; and, sometimes it even means dying.



If the Task Force adopted this definition and all that it means, they would soon realize that the barriers to solving the problems of homelessness across the province with only 4 million dollars would be insurmountable.

It appeared that, at the closing of the day, the Task Force had come to comprehend this reality.

The five members of the Task Force listened respectfully to service providers and consumers, asking relevant questions after each presentation, and appeared to be genuinely concerned about homelessness in our community.



A United Way Member
Agency

However, at the end of the day, the Chair concluded that while they understood and sympathized with the issue, the fiscal reality was that they could not afford to solve this problem. And, in one way, they were right.

While the government could, and should, increase the amount of provincial dollars allocated to the issue of homelessness, it would take the combined efforts of the federal, provincial and municipal governments to successfully combat the hopelessness of this issue. While this community must continue to lobby all levels of government for resources, on behalf of people who are homeless, we must also look to the money the provincial government has already allocated and design a community response that will have the maximum impact on the homeless in Hamilton-Wentworth.

What is essential to making these dollars count is the collaborative input of all community members toward the design of a service which will make the most significant impact on the issues of homelessness. Fortunately, Hamilton-Wentworth has a history of networking among agencies serving people who are homeless (for example, the Food and Shelter Advisory Committee to Regional Council), thereby making this collaboration easier to attain. Certainly, the Social Planning and Research Council would be willing to facilitate this cooperative venture, ensuring that all stakeholders, including people who are homeless, have input into the allocation of these new dollars. Only by continuing to work together can we make an impact on homelessness in our community. ■

SPRC STAFF UPDATES

Theresa Vo & Walter Hollander started January 12th, 1998 and will finish May 1st, 1998. Computer Science Technology - Software Engineering Co-Operative Education Program. These two co-op students from Mohawk College have been working on inventories for the capabilities of each computer at SPRC and working on mini projects in the area of database management. They have also been assisting the Self Help Centre staff and the staff at the Housing Help Centre. ■

Suzanne Brown, Social Planner - As of February 10th, 1998 has returned from her maternity leave. Suzanne is working part time (on Tuesdays and Thursdays) and will be returning to full time hours on September 7th, 1998. Suzanne's work assignments include: Hamilton-Wentworth Coalition for Social Justice, Vision 2020 Community Focus Groups with the Region's Environment Department, Social Housing Access Committee (SHAC) and the Parents Under Construction evaluation. ■



SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON-WENTWORTH

*Invites applications to fill volunteer positions on our
Board of Directors*

*These are voluntary positions, without remuneration and
involve attendance at one or two meetings per month for
terms of office ranging from one to three years.*

*The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-
Wentworth (SPRC)
is a non-profit community-based agency which is
committed to
public participation in the development of social policy in
Hamilton-Wentworth.*

*If you are interested in applying for a position with the
Board of Directors, please send a brief letter of intent
which describes the reasons for your interest in the
SPRC and the experience/skills and perspectives that you
could bring as a Board member.*

*The Council is seeking volunteer Board members with
program development experience and knowledge of
strategies which respond to community social trends.
Diverse perspectives are welcome in addressing
community issues.*

*The SPRC welcomes the participation of all members of
the community on its Board of Directors.*

*Please forward your letter before May 8th, 1998 to:
Nominating Committee c/o SPRC
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*For more information about the SPRC
please consult our web site:
<http://www.netaccess.on.ca/~sprc/>
or contact Sally Quider, SPRC at 522-1148 ext 308
or Fax 522-9124 or E-mail us: sprc_hw@yahoo.com*



Wingfield Unbound

Starring Rod Beattie

Thursday May 28th
at the
du Maurier Ltd. Centre

for tickets call 522-PLAY

Hosted by:

McMaster University's
School of Social Work
and

The Social Planning and Research Council
of Hamilton-Wentworth

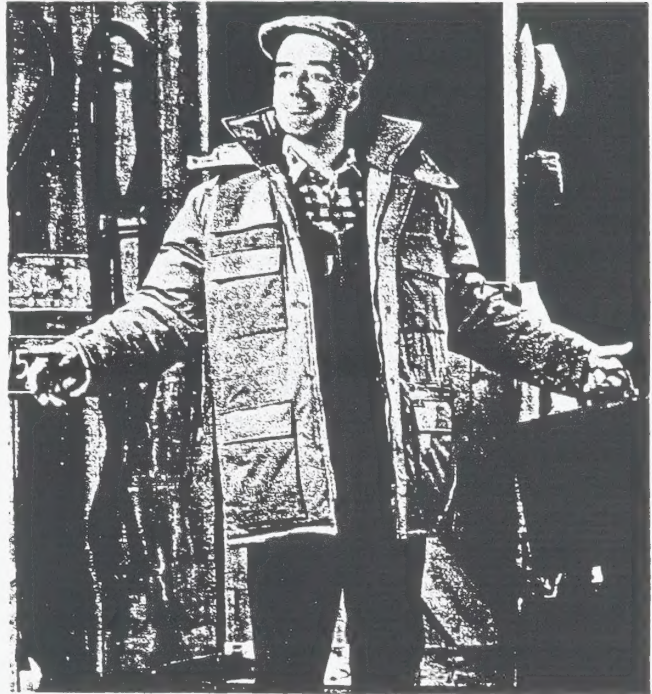


Photo by John Plank

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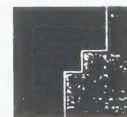
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PROJECT & EVENT UPDATES

Information Update on LINKS Voicemail Project:

By: Marguerita Kirton

The LINKS voicemail project that is being implemented by various social service agencies in Hamilton, has made significant progress over the past months. Our last newsletter update noted that the project was

providing service to about 60 people in the Hamilton area. To date, the number of subscribers has increased to nearly 100. The increase in the number of subscribers was made possible by many agencies that have actively educated their clients about the



benefits of having LINKS voicemail. One of the benefits that was noted is an enhanced ability in receiving messages in a reliable manner, which consequently provides better access to potential employers, friends, family and other professionals in the community.

We would like to thank the agencies who have been noted by subscribers as the agencies where they were given information about the benefits of the LINKS voicemail project: Job Links, Housing Help Centre, Employment Centre, Friends, Neighbour to Neighbour, Salvation Army, Various Women Shelters, St Mathews, Job Finding Club, Helping Hands, Urban Core Community Centre, Wesley Centre, SISO, Insamuch House, Social Services Resource Centre Hamilton, Welfare, Roxborough Drop-In Centre, Resource Centre, Hughson St.

In our quest to have more agencies act as subscription sites in times of economic hardships, we will be sending out information packages to agencies who requested them. The information packages will consist of original copies of flyers and leaflets which can be used as a means of producing copies for clients. The promotional video that was mentioned in our previous newsletter is in the last stages of production and should be available for viewing by the end of March.

If you would like more information on the project or would like to become a subscription site please call Donna at the Housing Help Centre at 528-0221, or Marguerita Kirton and Martha Davies (students from McMaster University who are currently working on the project) at 522-1148 ext 301. ■

Plastimet Update:

By: Daniel Kikulwe

We are now in the final stages of the Plastimet Project. The SPRC approach to the Plastimet subject focused on the neighbourhood organizing process because many of the earlier documents by other national and local authors had exhaustively covered many of the different areas related to this event. The intent of this approach was to provide North End residents an opportunity to voice some of their experiences as they organized themselves to collectively demand from government better physical conditions in their community. The information form for the upcoming North End paper was provided by some of the residents themselves through interviews. The interviewing process allowed residents further opportunity to express their concerns and matters regarding neighbourhood organizing and other related Plastimet issues. A final report that details the different aspects of the organizing efforts of the North End residents will be available shortly to all interested community members. ■

Report From the Self Help Centre:

By: Alison Douglas

Does your group need to meet during the day or evenings? The Self Help Centre can help you with meeting room rentals. We have three rooms available that seat from twenty to thirty-five people and an auditorium that seats 100 people. The auditorium is equipped with a kitchen and a wheelchair accessible washroom. Also, two of the three meeting rooms are wheelchair accessible.

Our rates are \$15.00 per hour and we supply volunteer security on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. We also have commissionaires available at \$10.00 per hour for weekends and Monday and Friday evenings. Please call Alison at 522-7353 ext. 300 to book a room or should you require any further information.

Last minute bookings will be accommodated if possible. ■

Hot Off the Press! The Hamilton-Wentworth Community Action Program For Children (CAPC) Project Releases Its First Local Evaluation Report!

By: Marilyn Swinton

In the spring of 1994, the Hamilton-Wentworth CAPC project received 1.5 million dollars from Health Canada to provide services for families "at-risk" with children aged zero (prenatal) to six years of age living in East Hamilton and Stoney Creek. Evaluation results contributed to the project's success in obtaining renewed funding for an additional 1.5 million dollars to continue its work for another three years (until March 31 2000).

Administered by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth, the project is a collaborative effort of the following four lead agencies:

- The Regional Community Services Department
- The Regional Public Health Department
- St. Joseph's Community Health Centre
- The Skills Through Activity and Recreation Program (STAR)

The funding received from Health Canada covers the direct operating costs and some capital expenses. Additional supports such as supervision, planning and committee work are contributed by the four lead agencies.

The CAPC Local Evaluation Report summarizes evaluation findings on the seven CAPC programs, and on the project as a whole for its first three years of funding (April 01 1994 - March 31 1997). The report consists of eight components, which summarize evaluation findings on the overall project and each of the seven programs offered through the project:

- Baby's Best Start
- Community Access to Child Health (CATCH)
- The Community Support Worker Program
- Nobody's Perfect
- Parents Helping Parents
- Skills Through Activity and Recreation (STAR)
- The Student Parent Resource Area/Young Parent Program



Many different evaluation methods were used to collect information on both the process of program development and on the impact of the programs on participants' lives. These methods included: a program development form completed every six months by program staff, an attendance form completed at each session of a program, a demographic

information form completed by program participants, a written evaluation form completed by program participants, a written evaluation form completed by program staff, focus groups completed with program participants at each of the programs, and qualitative interviews completed with a sample of CAPC participants.

The Local Evaluation Report summarizes the information collected through the evaluation methods outlined above. This report is the product of ongoing collaboration with participants of the CAPC programs, staff at the CAPC programs and members of the CAPC Evaluation Committee.

In the report, there is a detailed description of each of the seven CAPC programs, as well as an overview of both the structure and the evaluation of the project. The number of participants served by the programs is described, along with their demographic characteristics. Qualitative data is presented in participants' words to describe key themes which emerged from questions asking why people attend the CAPC programs, and changes participants have made as a result of their involvement in the CAPC program. Spin-offs of the project are also described.

Copies of the full report, individual components and/or executive summaries are available through the Social Planning and Research Council. Order yours today by phoning 522-1148! ■



Violence Prevention in Hamilton-Wentworth

By: Dr. Ronald Bayne

Those who attended the 1st Stop the Violence Conference at the Hamilton Convention Centre on October 31st, and November 1st, 1996, will recall that 32 Actions were developed and listed in the Action Plan, along with the catalyst organization that undertook implementation, and collaborators. The Conference Report with the Action Plan is available from Continuing Education, Health Sciences, McMaster University (tel: 525-9140 ext 22111). A Coordinating Committee was formed to follow-up on the actions and to offer assistance if needed.

In November 1997, the 32 Actions in the Action Plan were reviewed by the Coordinating Committee. (This list is available from the SPRC office tel. 522-1148). Two further conferences have been held in accordance with Actions listed in the Action Plan. These are the Spirit of Sport Conference, and Students Against Violence Conference.

The Spirit of Sport Conference implemented Actions #3, (Develop information and policies for coaches to prevent violence and abuse in local amateur sports), and #25, (Review the results of the 1st Stop the Violence Conference, plan for the next). It was held on October 25th, 1997 as part of Amateur Sports Week in Hamilton. Sixty coaches and officials attended and identified the major issues of violence and abuse in amateur sports, and what actions were needed. The final Report is available through the City of

Hamilton Culture & Recreation Department (tel. 546-2450).

The Spirit of Sport Task Force was set up, under the Chairmanship of Peter Rosser, Catholic Youth Organization, and it is developing a program and policies that aim not only to reduce violence in amateur sports in Hamilton, but also to promote a new sports culture emphasizing non-violence and fair play.

The Students Against Violence Conference was held on March 2nd, 1998 at the Self-Help Centre, and was sponsored by the Social Planning and Research Council.

It implemented Actions #14, (Promote conflict resolution and social skills education in high schools), #15, (Increase awareness in high school students of the effects of school reform on their personal development), and #19, (Develop student wellness centres) from the 1st Violence Prevention Conference Action Plan.

82 High School students attended, and 16 teachers from 17 schools. Five topic areas were offered for discussion, Violence in Schools, Violence in Sports, Violence in the Media, Violence in the Community, and Violence in Relationships. Each registrant could choose 2 topics.

Discussions were held in small groups (10 to 12 persons), each with trained student facilitators and a Resource Person with experience in the topic under discussion.

The conference was chaired jointly by Jason Reynar a student from Sir Allan McNab High School, and Melissa Erskine a student from Orchard Park High School. The

morning address was given by Mrs. Sylvia Kajiura, who is a Hamilton Community Foundation Board Member. At noon, Norma Frankoff from the United Way of Burlington, Hamilton-Wentworth spoke briefly on obstacles to initiating change, and the students from the Sir John A. MacDonald High School Theatre Arts program, presented "Bully Proof", a musical drama, under the direction of Chris Lane. A closing short wrap-up session allowed the facilitators to report on their groups.

In each discussion group the students were asked to identify the major issues, and what action each one might take individually or with others, to reduce violence. The Students participated actively, and the evaluations indicate a high level of enthusiasm. Flip charts were used to record the Issues and Actions, and will be used to provide the information for the final report. This report will be available by May 1st, 1998 from the Social Planning and Research Council.

The organizers of the Students Against Violence Conference would like to thank the Hamilton Community Foundation for their generous financial support of this event. A special thank-you also goes to the ESMail Group of Midland Walwyn Capital Inc. for their financial support. ■



Serving Hamilton-Wentworth & Burlington

A NEW INITIATIVE

The Community Action Program for Children is pleased to be partners in the new **Healthy Babies/Healthy Children** initiative. This partnership will allow the expansion of home visiting services provided by the Parents Helping Parents Program. The official launch of Healthy Babies/Healthy Children took place on Thursday, April 9th, at the Self Help Centre.

by: Sharon Charters

In the Spring of 1997, the Provincial Government announced funding for a new Province wide program called "Healthy Babies/Healthy Children" (HBHC). This new program is a collaborated initiative between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

WHAT IS HEALTHY BABIES/HEALTHY CHILDREN?

The Healthy Babies/Healthy Children program targets all pregnant women and families with children up to six years of age. The goal is to promote the best physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of all children, particularly those children who may be at risk for developmental difficulties.

HBHC is a voluntary program and it is designed to:

- Help families find and access community services and supports.
- Identify families who may be living in difficult or stressful situations and ensure that they get connected with the support or services that they need.
- Increase effective parenting through education, support and linking with community resources.
- Increase the number of children who reach appropriate developmental milestones by making sure that they have enough nurturing, stimulation, and opportunity for social interaction.

WHO CAN BENEFIT FROM HBHC?

HBHC can help all families find and access community support, however, HBHC is also concerned about children and families who are living in risk conditions such as:

- Social or financial risks (poverty, social isolation, young parents, single parent

- families, cultural/language isolation)
- Infant health risks (low birth weight, congenital defects or syndromes, medical conditions)
- Parent health risks (mental illness, substance abuse, family violence, developmental disability)

HOW CAN FAMILIES ACCESS HBHC?

In the hospital when having a baby, all women will be asked if they want to participate in the HBHC program. Women may also hear about HBHC from their family doctor, midwife, or obstetrician. In addition, families may also refer themselves at any time.

Once referred to HBHC, a Public Health Nurse (PHN) will contact the family by phone or a home visit to talk about their concerns and identify what kind of help would be most appropriate and useful. The HBHC works with families to ensure that they get the assistance needed to access support and community services. In addition, HBHC also provides home visiting services by individuals (Lay Home Visitors) in the community who have special training in many areas such as parenting, growth and development, nutrition, safety, and community resources. "Lay Home Visitors" work with families in their home and provide them with peer support, basic education and information, and to help connect families with community resources and services.

For More Information, or to refer to the Healthy Babies/Healthy Children program, please call the Parent-Child/Healthy Kids information line at 546-3618 or Community Information Services at 528-0104. ■



Evaluating Ontario Works in Hamilton-Wentworth

By: Mark Fraser

As you may know from local media coverage, the SPRC has contracted with the Regional Department of Community Services to conduct an important part of the evaluation of the Ontario Works program in Hamilton-Wentworth. The region contends that the new Ontario Works program will support those on assistance to more successfully return to the work force. Our research question then, is as follows: "Which program elements are proving most effective for which people?". In our attempts to answer this question we will gather information from Ontario Works participants on their experience, both positive and negative, with specific program elements. Following is a brief overview of the evaluation plan.

The evaluation plan focuses exclusively on the impacts on participants involved in Ontario Works in Hamilton-Wentworth. It is part of a larger overall evaluation of the Ontario Works Program being conducted by the Community Services Department. It involves a longitudinal study of Ontario Works participants over a period of eighteen months.

Beginning in January, 1998, a baseline sample of seven hundred and sixty-five (765) Ontario Works participants will be surveyed. Surveys will be

conducted primarily by telephone, but will be mailed to those without access to a telephone so that all participants have the opportunity to take part in the evaluation. In cases where communication is an issue, translators will be contracted as required.

In terms of data to be collected during baseline surveys, a number of variables will be examined including: various personal data; employment history and perceived barriers to employment; perceptions of job readiness and attitudes toward job search; perceived likelihood of finding work; satisfaction/dissatisfaction with Ontario Works, and support from their caseworker.

At the time of the baseline survey, participants are informed that we will be contacting them again in the future. Three follow-up surveys will be conducted at six month intervals, again, primarily by way of telephone interviews. During follow-up surveys, many of the same perceptions, attitudes and levels of satisfaction will be reassessed. In addition, participants will be asked about their involvement in, and assessment of, specific employment supports, community placements, or any other programs associated with Ontario Works.

An important feature of the evaluation plan is that it was designed to track all baseline participants, regardless of any changes in status. For example,

if an individual completes the baseline survey but is employed when contacted for the first follow-up survey, they will still be surveyed. In doing so, we will be able to track individuals as their cases are deactivated and possibly reactivated, enabling us to assess the nature and stability of their employment.

Focus groups have also been scheduled part way through the evaluation. The inclusion of focus groups will enhance the evaluation in two distinct ways. They will afford us the opportunity to confirm findings from surveys, and add depth to the analysis through the collection of anecdotal data from participants.

Through the course of the evaluation, the SPRC will consult with key stakeholder groups including host agencies providing placements, agencies providing employment supports and program participants. These advisors will provide guidance on the evaluation process and enrich the interpretation of findings. The SPRC will release, in conjunction with the Community Services Department, all interim and final evaluation findings to the community to ensure community awareness of program impacts.

The Community Services Department will conduct the evaluation of other aspects of the Ontario Works Program such as the impacts on agencies hosting community placements and the impact of the various employment support services. ■

Volunteers . . . Hamilton Wentworth's Greatest Natural Resource

Volunteer Spotlight . .



"I feel very privileged to be a Board Member of the Social Planning and Research Council. We are entering a period of profound change at the municipal level, through the impact of provincial down loading. As such, the SPRC will play a leadership role in monitoring trends and providing an analysis of the impact of these changes on the citizens of Hamilton-Wentworth."

Debbie Sheehan, Program Manager
Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Public Health Department

Debbie has been a Board Member since June 1996.

National Volunteer Week April 19th, to 25th, 1998!

Many events are taking place this year to recognize the greatest natural resource in Hamilton-Wentworth, that resource being - **Volunteers!**

The SPRC has been served well for over thirty years by volunteers. Their donation of time, energy and talents is genuinely appreciated by staff and the community as a whole.

Staff would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for the volunteer support and commitment to this organization on the part of our Volunteers.

**I have
VOLUNTEER
spirit!**



SPRC's Newest Volunteer. . .

Shanti Ravindran - Since the 1st week in March Shanti has been volunteering at the SPRC. We appreciate having a volunteer with her extensive skills assisting us.

Shanti's assignment project is to prepare a short paper outlining current labour force trends.



SPRC INFORMATION PAGE:

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MISSION STATEMENT: As an independent voice in the community, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton-Wentworth will act to improve the quality of life for all citizens by engaging in activities which will result in:

- A: Improved social policies and services - Effective social policy analysis - Effective services - Effective identification of gaps in services - Effective advocacy for change
- B: Maximized access for all citizens to the opportunities afforded by society: - Well informed community - Improved community attitudes - Effective delivery of service - Effective support to individuals and groups - Removal of barriers to participation in the life of the community.
- C: Effective citizen involvement in the continuing consideration of social issues: - Effective identifications of issues - Expanded community awareness of issues - Effective public participation programs - Effective community organization.

COMMUNITY

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